Ethnically targeted advertising: views of those not targeted

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper sets out to extend current knowledge on advertising effects on those not targeted by noting unintended consequences on attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral reactions.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper tests these effects based on relevant theories in the communication and advertising literature on two distinct ethnic groups (Malay and Chinese) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia utilizing questionnaires based on a fictitious advertisement for the dominant and non-dominant ethnic group in Malaysia. The advertisement used was for a fictitious can of drink and its design was common in Malaysia. Data collected were analyzed using Manova, General Linear Model, and Bonferoni.

Findings – There were negative attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral reactions by those not targeted who saw these advertisements.

Research limitations/implications – One limitation is that the study used two different advertisements, but each respondent saw only one. The advertisement was also for a fictitious product. Future research will benefit from further improvements (impact of product type or advertisement format) and replication of other ethnic groups or targeted groups.

Practical implications – A practical implication is the importance of predetermining the appropriate use of language and dominance of the targeted group. Targeted communications strategy may not be the most effective method of communicating with a specific ethnic group in a plural society.

Originality/value – The major contribution of this paper consists of the determination of negative effects of advertising on those not targeted, and the finding that the level of dominance plays a role in consumers' reactions towards targeted advertising. The paper is of value to advertisers, researchers in advertising, and social science scientists.

Keywords Advertising, Target markets, Ethnic groups, Chinese people, Malaysia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The issue of standardization or adaptation of advertisements has long been discussed in the marketing field (Agrawal, 1995; Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Pae *et al.*, 2002; Papavassiliou *et al.*, 1997; Solberg, 2002). On the face of it, the major strategic choice that a marketer makes across transnational segments is well discussed. However, it is also clear that previous cross-national cultural standard/measurement by authors such as Trompenaars, Maznevski, Schwartz, and Hofstede, has its own weaknesses. These weaknesses include the possibility of differences within a nation, such as between ethnic groups. In Malaysia, various studies have highlighted the fact that language, religion, and time are particular to Malaysia and significantly different to Western held beliefs (Fontaine and Richardson, 2003).

This debate is gaining popularity in the international advertising literature (Agrawal, 1995; Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Pae *et al.*, 2002; Papavassiliou *et al.*, 1997; Solberg, 2002). This may be because advertising often accounts for the greatest share of the

marketing budget; because it is the most visible marketing activity; and/or because communication is culturally bound and thus advertising is the element requiring the closest scrutiny before a standardization or adaptation strategy is considered. However, the related issue of audience alienation is hardly addressed.

There have been numerous studies of the unintended consequences of domestically focused advertising. Moral, social and psychological effects are typically researched. These unintended effects include encouraging a preoccupation with physical attractiveness (Downs and Harrison, 1985; Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Myers and Biocca, 1992; Silverstein et al., 1986) and sexuality (Pollay, 1986), with a consequent increase in eating disorders among women and girls who aspire to be more like the "ideal" models featured in the advertisements they see (Peterson, 1987). Other unintended advertising effects include the promotion of materialism (Richins, 1996), status seeking, social stereotypes, short sightedness, selfishness, and conformity (Pollay, 1986). Some researchers have concluded that advertising narrows audiences' views of reality (Ottesen, 1981; Pollay, 1986; Richins, 1991, 1996), affecting values, taste, and culture (Ottesen, 1981; Pollay, 1986).

Nevertheless, there has been little research into the negative impacts of cross-cultural marketing on unintended audiences (i.e. those audiences who are exposed to mass media advertising that targets other ethnic, cultural, or social groups). Yet if these unintended audiences become alienated, they could generate negative Word of Mouth about the firm and/or refuse to purchase other products or services targeted at them now or in the future. Thus, potential avenues for market penetration and growth could be lost.

This research explores the issue of audience alienation by assessing the reactions of non-targeted groups to ethnically targeted advertising in a multicultural Asian country, namely Malaysia. It utilizes the dominant ethnic group (Malay) and a major non-dominant ethnic group (Chinese). The study uses a sample of consumers who were exposed to ethnically targeted advertisements for a fictitious soft drink. The results have important implications for cross-cultural and international advertising campaigns that utilize mass media channels of communication. The implications are as relevant for firms that choose standardization or adaptation strategies. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first discussion of the relevant literature is presented; then a research model is proposed and tested; finally academic and managerial implications, limitations, and areas for future research are discussed.

Literature review
Targeted advertising
The issue of targeted vs non-targeted (adapted or standardized) advertisements has been discussed in the international advertising literature for a long time (Agrawal, 1995). Researchers have judged adaptation or standardization based on the performance of companies that follow either ideology in its overall marketing strategy (Albaum and Tse, 2001; Samiee and Roth, 1992; Szymanski et al., 1993). Only a few have seen this issue from the perspective of the consumer towards the advertisement (Shoham, 1996; Somasundaram and Light, 1994) and fewer still have noted the effect to the company from those not targeted.

Writers in recent years have begun to note the reactions of unintended (i.e. non-target group) audiences to advertising. Studies have included the reaction of gays to advertising targeting them, the viewpoint of companies advertising to the gay community, their fear of a backlash from the non-gay community (Kates, 1997, 1999)

and the responses of heterosexual consumers to homosexual imagery in advertising (Bhat *et al.*, 1998). Other researchers have looked at how non-targeted groups react emotionally to billboards targeting other groups (Touchstone *et al.*, 1999) as well as how they interpret advertising and their attitude towards advertising (Aaker *et al.*, 2000; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999). There is also some research into how those not targeted reacted to different promotional pricing (Feinberg *et al.*, 2002).

Non-targeted groups have every opportunity to see targeted promotions (Barnard and Ehrenberg, 1997; Pollay, 1986). They can and do make their own personalized views of such promotions (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Mick and Politi, 1989). Groups of people differ systematically in their affinities, abilities, purposes, and prejudices and as a result each group will look at an advertisement differently and develop its own shared reactions and interpretation (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Scott, 1994). The varied meanings derived from the same message results from individuals' efforts to create order in their own lives (Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie, 1979; Kelly, 1955; Smith *et al.*, 1956). As targeted advertising will reach many, any effect on company image and performance will depend on who is "reached" and their derived meaning of the advertisement.

It has been shown that targeted advertisements can create negative emotions from those not targeted (Touchstone *et al.*, 1999). Any emotional response generated in the viewing of an advertisement can affect attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand, and even purchase decisions (Batra and Ray, 1986; Holbrook and Batra, 1987). As such, by utilizing targeted advertising, a company may inadvertently generate negative attitudes towards the advertisement, brand, and reduce the purchase decisions of those not targeted.

Speech accommodation theory
The speech accommodation theory (SAT) supports these negative implications (Giles *et al.*, 1973). It is used to assess the degree to which the language used by the sender affects the reactions of the receiver (Giles *et al.*, 1973). This theory relates well to the aims of this paper as it is concerned with the actions of the message sender (the advertiser) in trying to accommodate the receiver (the audience), as well as how the receiver views the actions of the sender (Figure 1). SAT, which is also known as communications accommodation theory or, simply, accommodation theory, has become quite popular in communications research in recent years and has been used in various fields of study. These include mass media such as TV and radio (Bell, 1991; Roslow and Nicholls, 1996), print advertisements (Koslow *et al.*, 1994), courts (Dixon *et al.*, 1994; Linell, 1991), medical consultation (Street Jr., 1991), mental disability (Hamilton, 1991),
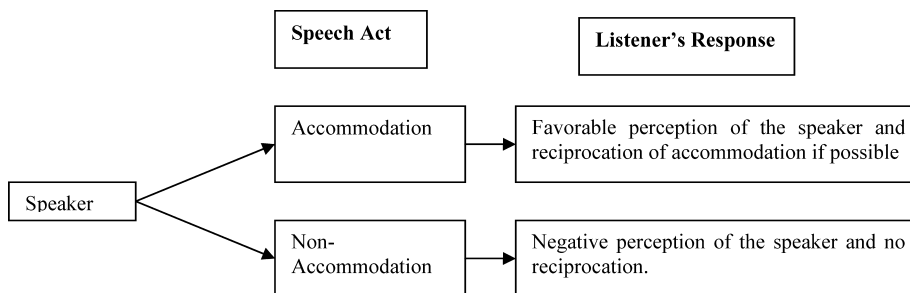

Source: Giles *et al.*,1973

therapy (Ferrara, 1991), organization communications (Bourhis, 1991), native interactions (Zuengler, 1991), ethnic accommodation (Gallois and Callan, 1991), gender (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 1995), and email (Crook and Booth, 1997).

The theory was proposed in a study of how speakers tend to accommodate receivers of a different language when delivering a message. Initially the theory leaned heavily on similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1969, 1971). The first part of the theory involves the speaker who makes his/her style more similar to that of the audience. This act is a strategy to integrate the audience and the speaker and to obtain a favorable response. The second part involves the audience response. It is too naive to state that there is a direct relationship between an accommodating speaker and audience response. Initially this was posited by Giles *et al.* (1973) but later research showed there are optimal reactions (Giles and Smith, 1979), situational factors (Ball *et al.*, 1984), psychological and contextual factors (Giles *et al.*, 1991), motives and intentions (Simard *et al.*, 1976), and incomplete or inappropriate convergence (Platt and Weber, 1984) that influences the response by the audience.

Ethnicity
Nevertheless, whatever meaning that an advertiser wishes to convey to a targeted group, advertising will almost certainly be seen by others who are not the targeted group (Pollay, 1986). In the case of this study, the groups used are ethnic groups in Malaysia. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country in South East Asia. It has a population of 23.27 million, where the majority of the population is Malay (50 per cent), followed by Chinese (26 per cent), and Indians (7.7 per cent) (Anonymous, 2004). Ethnic divisions are obviously visible in Malaysia and are based on language use in both formal and informal situations (Abraham, 1999; Platt, 1981; Watson, 1980). The ethnic diversity in Malaysia is divisive with individual ethnicities having their own perception of social reality (Milne, 1978). This can be utilized in a targeted promotional campaign and therefore able to be tested in this study.

There are two schools of thought regarding the definition of ethnicity. The first defines ethnicity through a subjective view, noting personal belief and an individual's own psychological identity about their cultural attributes (Laroche *et al.*, 1992), a psychological phenomenon (Hraba, 1979), behavioral (Fishman, 1977a, b) and self-identity with a specific ethnicity (Reilly and Wallendorf, 1984). The second more objective view of ethnicity looks at socio-cultural features such as religion, language, national origin, wealth, social status, political power, segregated neighborhoods, and cultural tradition (Bennett, 1975; Burton, 1996; Hirschman, 1981; Keefe and Padilla, 1987). This then brings us to the concept of "ethnic identity" and "ethnic identity strength".

Ethnic identity is a concept that is answered by the questions "What am I?" and "What am I not?" (Aboud and Christian, 1979; Brand *et al.*, 1974). It is a concept that refers to who a person is (Dashefsky and Shapiro, 1974; Frideres and Goldenberg, 1982) and is one of the many aspects in the identity of a person (Frideres and Goldenberg, 1982). Ethnic identity refers to one's identification with a specific ethnic group (Dashefsky and Shapiro, 1974; Driedger, 1978). In order for such identification to occur, a sense of common ancestry, based on shared individual characteristics or shared socio-cultural experiences (Driedger, 1978; Kitano, 1985), or a sense of shared values and attitudes (White and Burke, 1987), or feelings of belonging and/or commitment (Masuda, Matsumoto *et al.*, 1970; Ting-Toomey, 1981), must exist. When this occurs, ethnic identity will tell a person the correctness of one's actions and at the same time

allow for one to assess the correctness of an outsider's behavior (Frideres and Goldenberg, 1982).

In this study, Malays are defined as people who speak Malay, lead the Malay way of life and are of the Islamic faith and endogamy seems to be the rule (Asmah, 1983). They are believed to have migrated from Yunnan or Sumatra (Asmah, 1977, 1983). Malays are the largest ethnic group in Malaysia (Andaya and Andaya, 1982; Asmah, 1983; Mardiana, 2000). Malay social interaction is limited to the extended family unit with contacts with other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indian limited for the purposes of trade (Nazaruddin *et al.*, 2001; Purcell, 1965). The Malay language belongs to the Austronesian stock with a number of regional dialects (Asmah, 1977, 1983).

The Chinese in Malaysia are mainly descendants of immigrants from the southern coastal provinces of China (Lee and Tan, 2000; Nazaruddin *et al.*, 2001). The Chinese tend to be urban, but are nearly everywhere, in towns and villages alike (Purcell, 1965). In 1957, there were 2,332,963 Chinese (37.1 per cent) in Malaysia (Nazaruddin *et al.*, 2001) and while the number has increased, the percentage is now at around 26 per cent. Mandarin is the written and spoken language learnt at school but there are numerous spoken dialect groups (Lee and Tan, 2000). The Chinese have been economically dominant in the commercial sector (Andaya and Andaya, 1982; Chew, 1941; Mardiana, 2000), with daily contact with other races for trade purposes (Purcell, 1965). They are followers of various religions and practice endogamy (Asmah, 1983; Hodder, 1959; Purcell, 1965).

Dominant and non-dominant ethnic groups

In the context of a society, there are dominant and non-dominant groups of people, aside from the discussion of ethnicity. These dominance can be seen either numerically (Deshpandé and Stayman, 1994; Pollak and Niemann, 1998) while others argue for a social context to be taken into account (Grier and Deshpandé, 2001; Moscovisi, 1975; Oakes, 1987; Tajfel, 1981). Groups of people differ systematically in their affinities, abilities, purposes, and prejudices and as a result each group will look at an advertisement differently and develop its own shared reactions and interpretation (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Scott, 1994).

It has been shown in previous research that members of a dominant cultural group are socialized into one culture (the dominant culture) and therefore have only one set of cultural models that may be activated and acted on (stored in dominant cultural models) (Brumbaugh, 2002). Therefore, the judgment of the dominant ethnic group towards advertisements is colored by their own cultural models, which may be internalized differently by individuals, yet similar overall (Quinn, 1992). These models are used to determine their opinions of advertisements targeted at them or to other groups.

Knowledge of a subculture may be a sociotype (Triandis, 1994) or a stereotype (Katz and Braly, 1933). Stereotype refers to cognitive heuristics that are used when there is low motivation (Bargh, 1990; Kruglanski, 1990) and is believed to bias information by means of selective attention and recall (Johnson and Sherman, 1990). Non-dominant groups on the other hand, are socialized into both their culture and the dominant culture (Brumbaugh, 1995). Therefore both their own schema and the dominant schema affect how a non-dominant group reacts to an advertisement.

Previous studies have shown that members of minority groups are more likely than majority groups to have salient ethnicity (Deshpandé and Stayman, 1994). Because their distinctiveness has been singled out by targeted advertisements, consumers

identify with the message source, trust the message source and have more favorable intentions towards the advertisement, and the brand (Aaker *et al.*, 2000; Deshpande and Stayman, 1994; Forehand and Deshpande, 2001; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Jensen, 1998; Mehra *et al.*, 1998). However, there is a lack of studies that look at the reaction of a group of people when they are not targeted.

Propositions
The targeted advertisements that were tested were the Chinese and Malay language advertisements. This then leads to the following propositions that set out to determine the unintended consequences of a targeted advertisement.

P1a. Ethnic groups not targeted will have more negative emotional reactions than those targeted.

P1b. Ethnic groups not targeted will have more negative attitudes toward the advertisement than those targeted.

P1c. Ethnic groups not targeted will have more negative attitudes toward the company than those targeted.

P1d(1). Ethnic groups not targeted will be less likely to purchase the product than those targeted.

P1d(2). Ethnic groups not targeted will be less likely to recommend the product than those targeted.

Methodology
A typical two-stage study was employed. Initially, pre-tests were carried out for the advertisement design and the measures to be used. A factorial design was created and a survey employed to obtain responses.

In the study, factorial designs were employed. Factorial designs have been used in similar studies in advertising by other authors (Clarke, 1984; Goldberg and Gorn, 1974). The use of a factorial design was determined by the question at hand, propositions and treatments required. A factorial design allows for the use of more than one factor simultaneously, by forming groups of all possible combinations of the values of the various variables used (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 1998; McAlister *et al.*, 2003). The data were then analyzed using General Linear Model (GLM) to determine the significance of the reactions. The Bonferroni correction was used to measure interactions and to test the propositions. The sample sizes in cells in the manipulation tables were in the range of 99-100.

A fictitious soft drink was chosen as the product to be used in the advertisement as it met the requirements of familiarity and salience to respondents. It also met the study requirement of an ethnically neutral (a product that could be viewed by everyone in an emotionally neutral manner) and low involvement product. This was to avoid the compounding effects that may result from using a real brand and company and to minimize the compounding effects that could result from a high involvement product.

The advertisement was specifically designed to be concise and to the point, with minimal use of text and visual elements that may distract the viewer from the objective of the advertisement of targeting a specific ethnic group. The creative guidelines were based on Koslow *et al.* (1994) stimulus material construction. The advertisement included a picture of a can of soft drink, which was named "One", a slogan, a short message, the price of the drink, and the company details. The slogan was "Taste the

sensation" and the message was "Try our newest flavor today" which appeared next to the picture of the can. The price statement initially was "Just RM1.60" and placed either under the picture of the can or next to it. The company contact details were placed at the bottom of the advertisement. The designer translated the advertising copy into Malay and Chinese, which was retested for its meaning by the author.

A questionnaire was designed with a cover letter on the first page followed by one of the advertisements. Each respondent only viewed one advertisement. The measurements used are detailed in Table I and the measurements were presented in random order. The ethnic identification scale was placed at the end in order to reduce non-response as it was considered sensitive material (Malhotra, 1993). The measurements were modified from the original to a Likert Scale of 1-7, anchored by strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Findings

A total of 399 respondents were drawn from Kuala Lumpur. Subjects were selected on the basis of opportunity and availability. The sample consisted of 199 Malays and 200 Chinese (Table II). The questionnaires were distributed to enumerators to hand out or

Measure	Author	
Emotions: alienation, anger, racism, target of the Ad, threatened by the Ad	Touchstone *et al.* (1999)	
Attitude toward Ad	Henthorne *et al.* (1993)	
Attitude toward the Company	Peterson *et al.* (1992), Simard *et al.* (1976)	**Table I.**
Purchase Intention	Maheswaran and Sternthal (1990)	Sources of scales used
Word of Mouth	Becker and Kaldenberg (2000)	in the study

Factor		Frequency	Percent
Gender			
	Male	218	54.6
	Female	181	45.4
Education			
	No formal education	2	0.5
	Primary school	6	1.5
	Secondary school	208	52.1
	Diploma	122	30.6
	Degree	52	13.0
	Postgraduate	9	2.3
Age scale			
	0-19	4	1.0
	20-29	204	51.1
	30-39	92	23.1
	40-49	83	20.8
	50-59	16	4.0
Ethnicity			
	Malay	199	49.9
	Chinese	200	50.1

Table II.
Respondent profile

interview respondents via mall intercept at shopping centers, seminar and functions held by the Ministry of Unity in Kuala Lumpur. Means for the study are presented in Table III.

The initial test for the hypothesis used was a two (advertisement type) by two (ethnic) factorial design with a two-way MANOVA. A MANOVA shows if there is an interaction between any one of the numerous dependent variables to the fixed factors (Bray and Maxwell, 1985). In the case of this MANOVA, it is designed to test if there is a significant difference in the reactions of the different ethnic groups when viewing the different advertisements. The two-way MANOVA was found to be significant for advertisement type (Pillai $= 0.279$, $F = 30.116$, $p < 0.000$), ethnicity (Pillai $= 0.288$, $F = 31.609$, $p < 0.000$) and for its interaction (Pillai $= 0.500$, $F = 78.106$, $p < 0.000$).

Further analysis was conducted using GLM for each variable used to demonstrate if there is a singular interaction between each dependent variable and the fixed factors (Townend, 2002). The variable Attitude toward the Company (ATC) was significant for advertisement type ($F = 10.423$ $p<0.001$) and its interaction with ethnicity ($F = 173.61$, $p < 0.001$) but not for ethnicity ($F = 4.677$, $p < 0.031$). The variable Attitude toward the Advertisement (ATA) was significant for advertisement type ($F = 180.180$, $p < 0.000$), ethnicity ($F = 14.643$, $p < 0.000$) and its interaction ($F = 209.24$, $p < 0.000$). The variable Emotion (Emo) was significant for advertisement type ($F = 32.461$, $p < 0.000$) and ethnicity ($F = 9.969$, $p < 0.002$) but not significant for interaction ($F = 5.168$, $p < 0.024$). The variable Purchase Intention (PI) was significant for all, advertisement type ($F = 108.19$, $p < 0.000$), ethnicity ($F = 80.861$, $p < 0.000$) and its interaction ($F = 41.998$, $p < 0.000$). The variable Word of Mouth (WOM) was only significant for advertisement type ($F = 26.452$, $p < 0.000$) and not significant by ethnicity ($F = 5.922$, $p < 0.015$) and its interaction ($F = 0.876$, $p < 0.350$).

Assumptions for normality and equality of variance were checked for the variables Attitude toward the Company (KS $= 0.190$, $p < 0.000$; SW $= 0.919$, $p < 0.000$; Levene's Test $F = 4.066$, $p < 0.007$), Attitude toward the Advertisement (KS $= 0.163$, $p < 0.000$; SW $= 0.944$, $p < 0.000$; Levene's Test $F = 6.155$, $p < 0.000$), Emotion (KS $= 0.137$, $p < 0.001$; SW $= 0.964$, $p < 0.000$; Levene's Test $F = 3.789$, $p < 0.011$), Purchase Intention (KS $= 0.165$, $p < 0.000$; SW $= 0.946$, $p < 0.000$; Levene's Test $F = 27.882$, $p < 0.000$), and Word of Mouth (KS $= 0.467$, $p < 0.000$; SW $= 0.935$, $p < 0.000$; Levene's Test $F = 23.856$, $p < 0.000$). Visual examination of the histogram, Q-Q plots, and descriptive statistics indicates that the assumptions were verified.

The strong interaction effects indicated that it was appropriate to continue with a Bonferroni corrections to investigate further as to which variables were significant.

Variables	Overall Mean	SD	Malay/ Malay ad Mean	SD	Malay / Chinese ad Mean	SD	Chinese/ Malay ad Mean	SD	Chinese / Chinese ad Mean	SD
Emotion	3.29	1.20	3.30	1.28	2.91	1.01	3.92	1.15	3.01	1.11
Attitude towards Advertisement	3.26	0.87	3.77	0.81	2.48	0.52	3.04	0.67	3.74	0.71
Attitude towards Company	3.26	1.02	3.86	1.03	2.47	0.52	2.93	0.96	3.77	0.78
Purchase Intention	4.54	2.04	5.18	2.23	2.42	0.61	5.59	1.30	4.95	1.89
Word of Mouth	4.98	1.84	5.14	2.37	4.39	0.88	5.74	1.52	4.66	1.97

Table III.
Means for variables by ethnic and advertisement type

Means and a Bonferoni *T*-test are presented in Table IV for Malay advertisement and Table V for Chinese advertisement. A series of graphs are presented in Figure 2 that depicts the marginal means for the variables discussed. The findings support *P1a*, *P1b*, and *P1c* for Chinese respondents viewing Malay advertisements. It also supports *P1b*, *P1c* as well as *P1d (1)* for Malays viewing Chinese advertisements. This is shown in Table VI.

Discussion and implications

The context and method chosen to test the hypothesis may have a bearing on the findings. This study uses ethnically targeted advertising in a Malaysian context. Effects from the different ethnic groups' social hierarchies and Malaysian social situation may have an impact on the findings. It is therefore important to understand the situation in Malaysia in order to interpret and evaluate the findings.

In Malaysia, advertisements using various languages and language mixes are extensively shown on television, depicted in print, or spoken over the radio. Therefore,

Variable	Ethnic	Mean	SD	N	T	df	p	Bonferroni adjusted p signif? (test at 5%/5 = 1%)
	M	3.30	1.28	100				
Emotions	C	3.92	1.15	100	−3.84	395	0.00	Sig
Attitude towards	M	3.77	0.81	100				
Advertisement	C	3.04	0.67	100	7.53	395	0.00	Sig
Attitude towards	M	3.86	1.03	100	7.80			
Company	C	2.93	0.96	100		395	0.00	Sig
	M	5.18	2.23	100	−1.78			
Purchase Intention	C	5.59	1.30	100		395	0.08	NS
	M	5.14	2.37	99	−2.38			
Word of Mouth	C	5.74	1.52	100		395	0.02	NS
Notes: M = Malay, C = Chinese								

Table IV.
Means and Bonferroni test for Malay advertisement

Variable	Ethnic	Mean	SD	N	t	df	p	Bonferroni adjusted p signif? (test at 5%/5 = 1%)
	M	2.91	1.01	99	−0.62			NS
Emotions	C	3.01	1.11	100		395	0.53	
Attitude towards	M	2.48	0.52	99	−12.92			
Advertisement	C	3.74	0.71	100		395	0.00	Sig
Attitude towards	M	2.47	0.52	99				
Company	C	3.77	0.78	100	−10.83	395	0.00	Sig
	M	2.42	0.61	99	−10.93			
Purchase Intention	C	4.95	1.89	100		395	0.00	Sig
	M	4.39	0.88	99				
Word of Mouth	C	4.66	1.97	100	−1.06	395	0.29	NS
Notes: M = Malay, C = Chinese								

Table V.
Means and Bonferroni test for Chinese advertisement
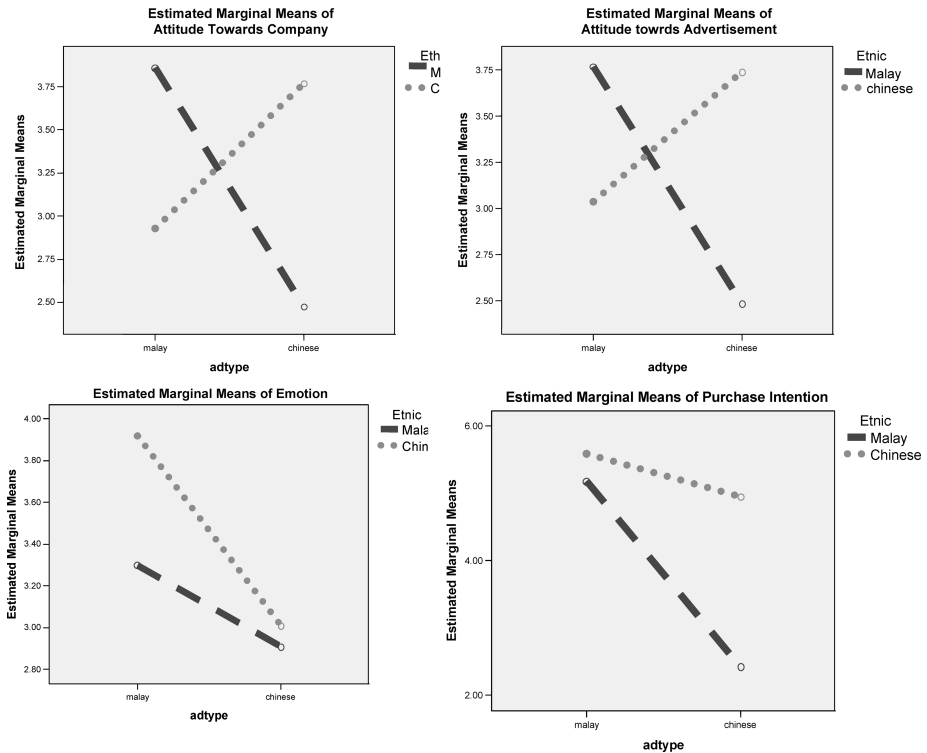
Figure 2.
Graphs representing
significant interaction

Ethnic group	Variables	Language in Advertisement			
		Malay		Chinese	
		P[a]	F[a]	P	F[a]
Malay	Emotions			−	− (NS[a])
	Attitude towards Advertisement			−	−
	Attitude towards Company			−	−
	Purchase Intention			−	−
	World of Mouth			−	− (NS)
Chinese	Emotions	−	+		
	Attitude towards Advertisement	−	−		
	Attitude towards Company	−	−		
	Purchase Intention	−	+ (NS)		
	World of Mouth	−	+ (NS)		

Note: [a]P – Posited, F – Finding (positive, negative, or NS for not significant)

Table VI.
Summary of findings for
proposition

there is a level of awareness and an acceptance of different languages used in
advertising. It would not be a surprise to a Malaysian to see an all Chinese language
advertisement on television or in print. Therefore the possibility of someone from a
particular ethnic group seeing a different language advertisement is quite high.

Malaysia is a plural society (Furnivall, 1948) and not a melting pot of ethnic groups. Due to this separateness, there has been a push from the government to integrate ethnic groups into the dominant group (Anonymous, 2002; Joseph and Holden, 2001). This is achieved by education and integration activities (Watson, 1980). The integration activities are based on the concept that uncoupling the bonds of nationality and culture will lead to open and equal communication (Dijkstra *et al.*, 2001).

The Malay is the dominant ethnic group, both by numbers and by social interaction. As the dominant ethnic group, they would have their own perception of the world (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Scott, 1994), socialized into one culture (the dominant culture) and therefore have only one set of cultural models that may be activated and acted on (stored in dominant cultural models) (Brumbaugh, 2002). Nevertheless it was found that Malays reacted similarly to Chinese when viewing a Chinese advertisement in respect to "Emotions" and "Word of Mouth". This defeats proposition *P1a* and *P1d(2)*. This is shown in Table VI.

Chinese respondents have a clearly different language and culture to Malay (Andaya and Andaya, 1982; Lee and Tan, 2000; Platt, 1981). This may be due to the numerical status of Chinese as it is large enough to withstand the push from the government for integration. In 1999, there was an estimated 5,597,900 Chinese in Malaysia (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 1999; Mardiana, 2000). Yet they are still the non-dominant ethnic group in Malaysia and, therefore, would have both theirs and the dominant group set of cultural models that may be activated and acted on (Brumbaugh, 2002). This may explain why *P1d(1)* and *P1d(2)* (behavioral) were not significant for Chinese respondents viewing Malay language advertisements. This is shown in Table VI.

Chinese reactions may be influenced by the situation in Malaysia where there is a form of "tall poppy" syndrome. This is where no one wants to stand out by criticizing another ethnic group, thus creating disharmony. This is in line with the cultural schema of a non-dominant ethnic group. This awareness allows the non-dominant group to act within social norms and expectations. The Malay reaction was not as obvious as expected. As the dominant ethnic group, the Malay should have their cultural schema and reject the Chinese advertisements. Nevertheless, two variables (Emotions and Word of Mouth) and two propositions (*P1a* and *P1d(2)*) were not significant. It is also possible that another driving force here is the unity movement created by the government to create integration between the races (Anonymous, 2000). It may also be because the Chinese themselves did not like their own language advertisement to the point that the scores were similar to that of the Malays.

The Chinese seemed to have more positive reactions for behavioral intentions (Not Significant). This indicates that they have similar behavioral intentions for the Bahasa Malaysia advertisements compared to their own Chinese language. It is however clear that for social use in Malaysia that language is more subject to the language of the dominant culture (Hui *et al.*, 1998; Lee, 1993). Therefore, it is expected that the non-dominant group would also prefer the dominant group's language. It could also be that many Chinese in Malaysia cannot read Mandarin and therefore would not understand the advertisement. They would be able to understand the Malay language advertisement and therefore react positively to it.

Previous studies have also noted that social reference may be founded upon historical group circumstances and group membership (Servaes, 1989; Smith, 1989, 1991). The greatest historical issue for Malay and Chinese was the 13 May 1969 incident[1] where Chinese suffered greatly (Anonymous, 2000). The Chinese are also

aware of their group membership and the social power held by Malays and therefore react accordingly (Depret and Fiske, 1993; Deschamps, 1982). They may not like the advert, language, or company but would still buy the product as it portrays the dominant group.

An issue raised by the findings is the distinctiveness of the subjects. It has been argued that the distinctiveness of a group is salient, when a group is a minority in numbers (Deshpandé and Stayman, 1994; Pollak and Niemann, 1998). Other researchers have argued that distinctiveness is salient because of the social context (Grier and Deshpandé, 2001; Moscovisi, 1975; Oakes, 1987; Tajfel, 1981). Distinctiveness theory states that the smaller the ethnic group is to the overall population, the more likely that ethnically targeted stimuli will be effective (Deshpandé and Stayman, 1994). Therefore by using ethnic cues (language) in the advertisement, it should make distinct the differences in ethnicity of the targeted group and the non-targeted group. However, the findings indicate that this does not always occur. It appears that the Malaysian social context may also be influencing respondents' reactions. For a marketer, this means that targeting a group because it is a minority is insufficient. A minority group may act in a similar way to the dominant group (Penaloza, 1994). It is clear that the minority here (Chinese respondents) acted similarly as to the Malays (*P1d(1)* and *P1d(2)* were not significant, indicating similar behavioral means).

The results support findings from previous studies that targeted advertisements can generate negative emotions among those not targeted (Koslow *et al.*, 1994; Touchstone *et al.*, 1999). This ties in with the issue of how consumers behave. The findings support the cognitive affective behaviour (CAB) paradigm (e.g. cognition determines affect which determines behavior) (Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook and Batra, 1987), particularly the role of normative belief as detailed in the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ryan and Bonfield, 1975).

It has been argued that a targeted communications strategy is the most effective method of communicating with a specific ethnic group (Hecht *et al.*, 1993; Kinra, 1997; Kumar, 2002). However, in a plural society such as Malaysia, targeted communications may cause unintended problems. The findings indicate that Malays will react negatively to Chinese language advertisement and vice versa (to a point).

A related, and hotly debated, issue in international advertising is the efficacy of adaptation vs standardization. Adaptation can occur for the creative selling proposition, elements in the advertisement and/or the language used (Harris, 1994). The efficacy of adapted advertisements has been argued by many (Green *et al.*, 1978; Lenormand, 1964; Shoham, 1996), but the issue raised here is the impact of the language chosen for the advertisements that are adapted to the local country and target market. As the findings indicate, if the language used in an ethnically targeted advertisement is not the dominant group's language, there is a possibility of negative reactions from those not targeted.

Conclusions

The study set out to examine the effects of ethnically targeted advertising, either positive or negative reactions of Malays and Chinese in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Reactions that were assessed were emotions, attitude to the advertisement, attitude to the company, and behavioral intentions. Five propositions were tested. The findings indicate partial support for the hypothesis set out. For Malay respondents, *P1b*, *P1c*,

P1d(1) were significant while for Chinese respondents, *P1a*, *P1b*, and *P1c* were significant.

The reactions of non-targeted groups that view targeted advertisements may not seem an important issue to many marketing academics and practitioners and has generally been neglected by scholars. Nevertheless, previous studies have shown that unintended audiences often view an advertisement targeted at other groups and make decisions regarding the advertisement, brand and company behind the advertising. These decisions may affect future consumer behavior. Previous work by Ehrenberg and associates show that consumers are polygamous in their choice of brands (Ehrenberg, 1988; Ehrenberg *et al.*, 1997). Thus, this study seeks to significantly add to the body of marketing knowledge about the unintended effects of targeted advertising.

This study extends previous targeting knowledge by showing that: (1) there are likely to be negative reactions to targeted advertising by those not targeted; (2) these negative reactions appear to be mediated by several factors based on the type of targeting (in this case language for a specific ethnic group); (3) there is a need for a holistic approach to assessing the efficacy of targeting instead of the present myopic view, which tends to focus only on benefits and ignores potential negative effects.

Limitations

The sampling that was carried out was based on convenience and thus may limit the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, it provides a sense of direction as the findings corroborate previous studies (De Run, 2004, 2005).

The data collection phase may also have created opportunities for possible bias when the enumerators read the questions to respondents. Direct contact with the enumerator and lack of privacy, may have resulted in some interviewer bias as well as some social desirability bias. However, the results suggest otherwise.

The study used two different advertisements, but each respondent only saw one. There was no opportunity for a direct comparison of advertisements by each individual, as this would necessitate an extremely long questionnaire. Because there was no comparison, individual reactions were clearly for that one advertisement alone. Nevertheless this provided a possible unbiased reaction from the respondents as they thought they were only responding to one advertisement.

The use of a fictitious advertisement, product, and company may have also confounded the findings. For example, the advertisements had only a limited number of words. Some respondents could not tell if the product was a soft drink (as was intended) or alcohol and the company name was certainly not recognized. As a fast moving consumer good, a soft drink is a lower involvement product than a durable good. This could result in less cognitive effort by respondents and therefore more average responses to the statements provided. These factors may have contributed towards the like or dislike of the advertisement and subsequent positive or negative reactions measured in the study. Nevertheless, it was necessary, as the researcher did not want past associations with a product or company to interfere with the findings.

Future research

There is a lack of replication research in marketing. One study found that replication research is generally endorsed in the sciences, but not so in the advertising/consumer behavior/marketing literature (Madden *et al.*, 1986). This inhibits further understanding of issues highlighted and investigated yet also calls for further replication of this study. The context may be different but replications should be

carried out to test if other forms of targeting (by demographics, psychographics, even by different ethnic groups and languages) also create the same results.

The nature of the product class could also be investigated. For example, it would be interesting to explore whether an ethnically biased product creates stronger reactions among those not targeted, than an ethnically neutral product. An ethnically biased product could be a high involvement purchase for a particular target group but a low involvement purchase for the non-targeted group. Alternatively, product class or type could be investigated, noting the impact of different products on unintended reactions.

Future studies could also use this study as a starting block to assess the costs and benefits of targeted advertising, by adding the positive and negative reactions of targeted and non-targeted audiences of mass media advertising. This could be replicated for various types of media.

Note

1. The 13 May 1969 incident refers to ethnic riots that occurred in Malaysia.

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